

# Whittier to receive Bax Seat Trophy

By Barbara A. Schmitz

Bob Whittier was 7 when he developed an ear infection that, left undiagnosed for too long, soon robbed him of his hearing.

"It made me more of a reader than most kids," he says. "There's a saying that deafness cuts a person off from people. I found that true."

Knowing he liked to read, someone gave the young boy a few aviation magazines to look at. He's been doing more than looking, however, ever since.

Over the nearly 60 years since then, Whittier has written more than 2,500 magazine articles and 10 books dealing with aviation, boating, mechanics, and the outdoors.

He will receive the 2003 Bax Seat Trophy award Thursday night at Theater in the Woods. The award, established in 1997 by *Flying* magazine to honor columnist Gordon Baxter, is given to the EAA member who perpetuates the tradition of communicating the excitement and romance of flight.

Whittier says reading that early aviation magazine got him interested in the sport.

"It was in the early 1930s, when the Lindbergh craze was very much

alive," Whittier says. "Every drug store, every department store, every hardware store had model airplane kits on sale for 10 or 25 cents."

Whittier built many such kits as a child, and living in southeastern Massachusetts, rode his bicycle to the six or seven small airports that dotted the countryside.

"I just started hanging around and became an airport kid," he says. "I really think spending Sunday afternoons at the airport was tremendously valuable. It helped me to learn how airplanes were built, maintained, and flew. It was the basis for my aviation knowledge today."

Whittier became so interested in airplane design, in fact, that in the early 1940s he earned his private pilot certificate and airframe and powerplant mechanic rating, later working at a number of small airports. During World War II, he was in charge of dispatching N3N-3s from Curtiss-Wright Airport in Milwaukee, now called Timmerman Field.

In about 1944, he was working on a small airplane and getting ever more frustrated that it was so difficult to reach behind the

instrument panel to work. So he wrote a letter to a now-defunct aviation magazine saying that many designers were not paying attention to ease of access in their design. They made an article out of it, and sent him a \$50 check.

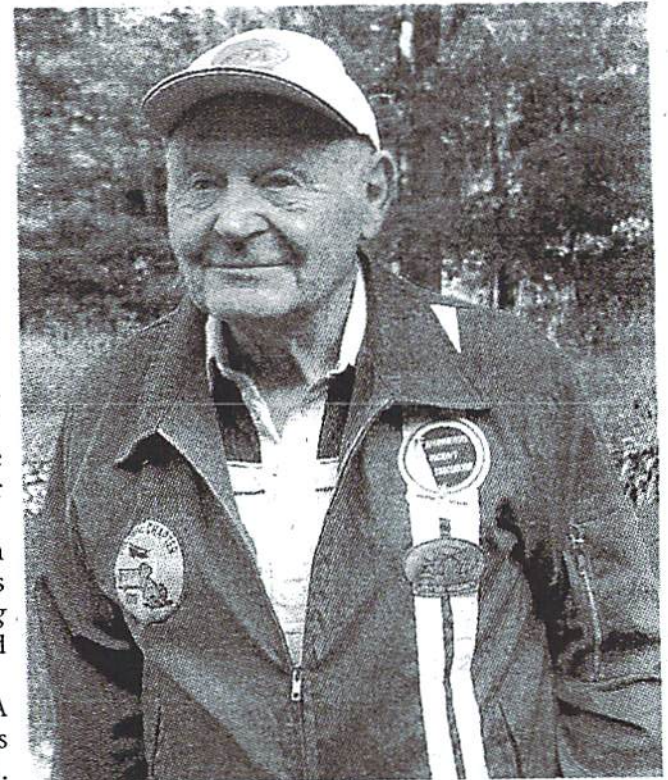
"I discovered magazines pay for articles," he says. "And, before long I was writing for *Air Facts* magazine."

He has also written for such publications as *To Fly*, *Messing About in Boats*, and *Hunting and Fishing*.

Whittier joined EAA in 1955 and holds member number 1235.

He began contributing to the original

*Experimenter* magazine shortly thereafter and continued writing how-to and historical articles for *EAA Sport Aviation* well into the 1970s. In the early 1990s, Whittier again began writing for the current *Experimenter*



Bob Whittier, Bax Seat Trophy recipient

magazine. His monthly column, "Light Plane Heritage," has appeared continuously since that time, covering the early history and development of light aircraft, including the whys and wherefores of aircraft construction.